MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

Between THE Lines™

SASHA VELOUR'S 'BIG REVEAL'

'Drag Race' superstar on the power of storytelling

GREET 2025 WITH HOPE

Michigan LGBTQ+ orgs prep for the new year

YEAR IN REVIEW

2024 BTL stories and voices that moved us

Jonathan Bennett's Power Move

From Necto nights to Hallmark lights, the 'Mean Girls' star's reign goes beyond the holidays

By Chris Azzopardi

Dr. Paul Benson's

Be Well Medical Center

EST. 1980: THE ORIGINAL LGBTQ CLINIC IN MICHIGAN

The Right Choice for Your Health

Since 1980, Be Well Medical Center has delivered compassionate, patient-centered healthcare. Led by Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein, our dedicated team prioritizes your well-being. As credentialed HIV specialists, we offer PrEP and Doxy PEP. Our inclusive approach ensures top-quality care for all backgrounds and lifestyles.

We are thrilled to introduce Dr. Andrew Roberts, a dedicated pediatrician specializing in care for individuals from birth to 21 years. Our clinic is now a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ youth seeking primary care.

Dr. Andrew Roberts wi h a Be Well Medical Center patient.

Four Locations

Be Well Medical Center
1964 11 Mile Rd,
Berkley, MI 48072
248-544-9300

Osborn Family Medical Clinic
13560 East McNichols Rd,
Detroit, MI 48205
248 544-9300

Community Health Awareness Group
1300 West Fort St.,
Detroit, MI 48226
313-963-3434 x118

Liv Well Clinic
5103 West Pierson St.
Flint, MI 48504
810-21-0605

Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein

4 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

6 These Michigan LGBTQ+ Orgs Will Have Your Back in 2025 After Trump's Inauguration

7 A Different Kind of Holiday Spirit: Sufjan Stevens Brings Queer Fans Together in Communal Song Across Michigan and Beyond

10 Creep of the Week: Drown Out the Trump's Anti-Trans Rhetoric with Love

11 The Scroll: Owosso Man Faces Life in Prison for Attempted Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate Attack

12 Why Are We Thirsting Over Luigi Mangione? The Ethical Dilemma Playing Out on Social Media

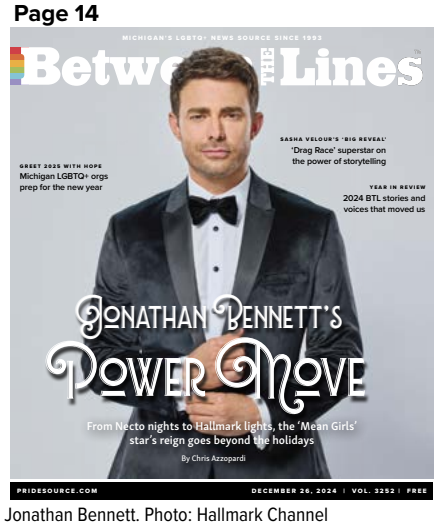
14 Jonathan Bennett's Power Move: The 'Mean Girls' Actor's Story Is a Testament to the Power of Being 'Unapologetically Yourself'

16 It's a Wrap: BTL Stories That Shaped 2024

20 Keep Them Guessing: Sasha Velour Talks the Power of Storytelling

22 Venture to Unexpectedly Queer Grand Rapids: Your Two-Day Itinerary for a Wintry Weekend Road Trip in West Michigan

Page 14


Between The Lines
GREET 2025 WITH HOPE
Michigan LGBTQ+ orgs prep for the new year
SASHA VELOUR'S 'BIG REVEAL'
'Drag Race' superstar on the power of storytelling
YEAR IN REVIEW
2024 BTL stories and voices that moved us
JONATHAN BENNETT'S
POWER MOVE
From Necto nights to Hallmark lights, the 'Mean Girls' star's reign goes beyond the holidays
By Chris Azzopardi
PRIDESOURCE.COM
DECEMBER 26, 2024 | VOL. 3252 | FREE

Jonathan Bennett. Photo: Hallmark Channel

Between The Lines
Delivered Straight to Your Mailbox
Support LGBTQ+ journalism and get BTL delivered to your door for just $95/year or $10/month.
WWW.PRIDESOURCE.COM/SUBSCRIBE

VOL. 3252 • DECEMBER 26, 2024
ISSUE 1268

PRIDE SOURCE MEDIA GROUP
www.pridesource.com
Phone 734-263-1476

PUBLISHERS
Benjamin Jenkins
benjamin@pridesource.com

Publishers Emeritus: Jan Stevenson & Susan Horowitz

EDITORIAL
Editorial Director
Chris Azzopardi
chris@pridesource.com

Managing Editor
Sarah Bricker Hunt
sarah@pridesource.com

Staff Content Creator
Liam Clymer
liam@pridesource.com

CREATIVE
Cartoonist
Paul Berg

Graphic Designer
Sarah Wolf

Contributing Photographers
Andrew Potter, Andrew Cohen

ADVERTISING & SALES
sales@pridesource.com

Carolyn Cardenas
734-263-1476
carolyn@pridesource.com

Tim Powers
734-263-1475
tim@pridesource.com

Ann/Andy Cox
anncox@pridesource.com

National Advertising Representative
Rivendell Media, 212-242-6863

MEMBER OF
Michigan Press Association
National LGBT Media Association
National Gay & Lesbian Chamber
Q Syndicate

nlgja
2022 AWARD WINNER

MPA Michigan Press Association
National LGBT Media Association
nglcc

"Pride Source"
Follow us @pridesource
@pridesourcemedia
Pride Source
Email your op–eds to editor@pridesource.com
Sign up online to receive our e–digest

Our rate cards are available online. All material appearing in Between The Lines is protected by federal copyright law and may not be reproduced in whole or part without the permission of the publishers. Between The Lines is supported by many fine advertisers, but we cannot accept responsibility for claims made by our advertisers, nor can we accept responsibility for materials provided by advertisers or their agents.

Copyright 2024

5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

After all the ups and downs of 2024, you deserve to start off 2025 right. So, it's a good thing the darkest weeks of winter are loaded with LGBTQ+ events to bring light and joy to the new year. Experience the teaming of queer music legends Melissa Etheridge and the Indigo Girls, find encouragement in your community with Corktown Health's post-election support groups and have a ball at NYE parties hosted by Detroit LGBTQ+ institutions. You can even see a fresh take on the Golden Girls in a live stage performance with all the laughs and sass of the original show!

Melissa Etheridge during her Broadway show "My Window." Photo: Jenny Anderson

1

Be Inspired by Queer Music Royalty

Going into a year already marked by the return of Donald Trump to office rightfully has many LGBTQ+ Michiganders reeling — it can feel difficult to start fresh when faced with the consequences of the previous year. But if anybody knows a thing or two about overcoming adversity, it'd be queer rock and folk greats Melissa Etheridge and Indigo Girls.
Thirty-two years after her influential album "Yes I Am" marked a significant moment in Etheridge's personal and professional journey of self-revelation, she, along with Amy Ray and Emily Saliers of Indigo Girls, will embark on the "Yes We Are" tour in 2025. Snag tickets now for their Michigan performance, so you can find inspiration in the expert lyricism and continued defiance of these legends.

Aug. 26, 7:30 p.m., Michigan Lottery Amphitheatre (14900 Metro Parkway, Sterling Heights). Get your tickets early at bit.ly/4flgdcI.

Motorball 2024, hosted by Geared for Life. Photo: Facebook/ @gearedforlifeofficial

2

Be a Part of TranscenDANCE

Detroit organization and Motorball host Geared for Life (GFL) is starting the next chapter in its expansive history of Detroit LGBTQ+ service, and you can be a part of it. On New Year's Eve, GFL will ring in the new year properly with a never-before-done celebration entitled "TranscenDANCE." Boasting an all-queer event line-up, the organization hopes to build up the next generation through a night of "music, dance, love, art and rebellion." With music by local talents such as Michigan Drag Awards DJ of the year nominee ANTI and self-proclaimed Y2K hot bimbo Garrison XR, GFL is laying the groundwork — all you need to do is show up. And, of course, all money made goes back into Detroit-area LGBTQ+ projects and needs.

Dec. 31, 10 p.m., The Olympus Theater (928 W. McNichols Road, Detroit). More details at bit.ly/3ZLOTii.

"The Golden Girls: The Laughs Continue" cast. Courtesy photo

3

Laugh with the Golden Girls

Blanche is more than a role for Detroit native Vince Kelley — she's a kindred spirit. "Blanche doesn't take herself too seriously and I don't either, so I feel like there's a pretty good marriage in that," Kelley told BTL. "She's the first one to laugh at herself, which I think is a good quality, especially now." Kelley is a part of "Golden Girls: The Laughs Continue," a stage parody of the classic sitcom. And while the production may have all the sass and heart of the original show, it makes modern changes that only enhance the entertainment value — from actors performing in drag to a wild plot surrounding CreakN', a dating app for seniors. Exclusive to the Detroit show is a showcase of actual Golden Girls costumes — artifacts Kelley describes as items that "actually touched [the Golden Girls'] bodies."

Jan. 16-19, showtimes vary, Fisher Theatre (3011 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit). Secure your spot at bit.ly/49Iq8Yz.

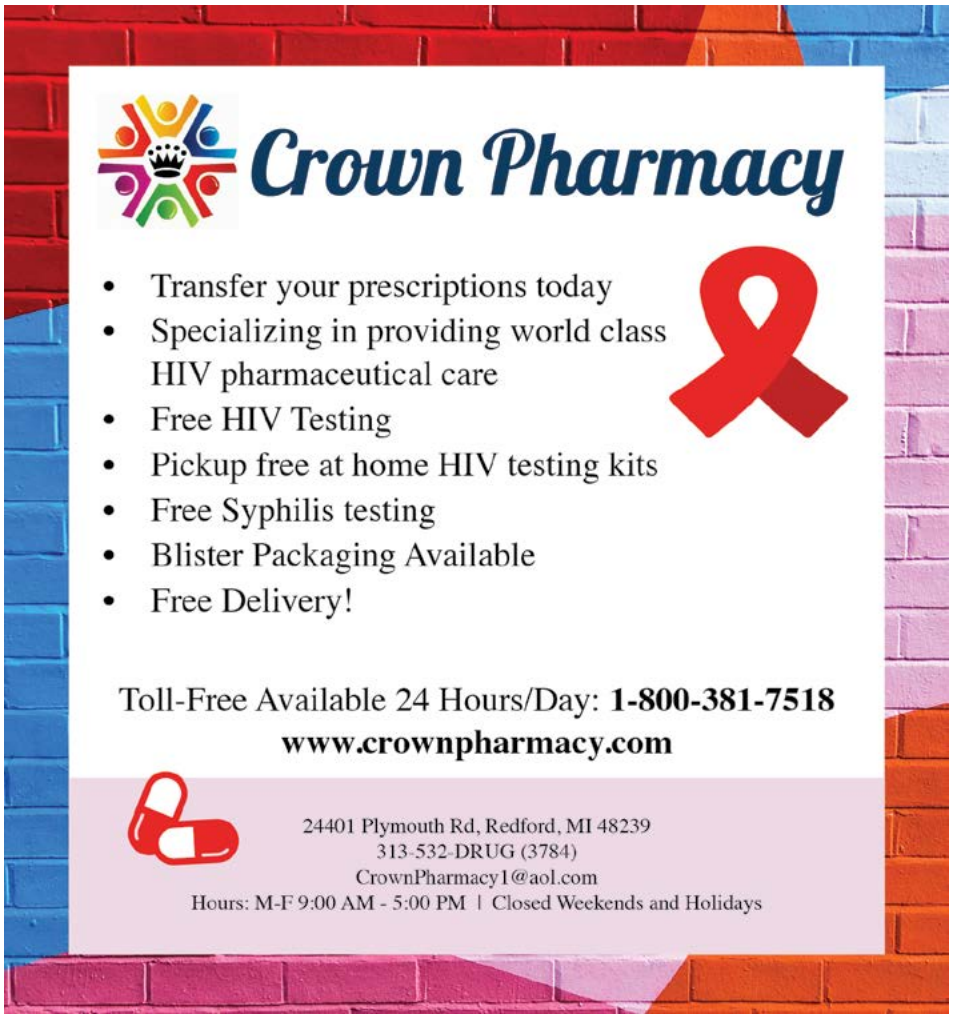
Bell Bastien. Courtesy photo

4

Start the Year Off Right at Five15

How does spending your New Year's Eve at a "sophisticated, all-inclusive supper club experience" sound? According to Five15 owner Gary Baglio, the venue's first-ever NYE VIP Disco Ball is a realization of that vision — with the added flair you'd expect from Pronto! and Five15. "Our goal is not just to meet expectations but to exceed them, creating an unforgettable experience that ushers in a new trend," Baglio said. The celebration will include a three-course meal and a live music performance by the first-ever featured LGBTQ+ couple on "The Voice," collectively known as Bell Bastien — or as they're known around these parts, "the Detroit Disco Daddies." And with mixes by DJ Adamusic playing till sun up, you can let loose and dance your way into the new year!

Dec. 31, 8 p.m., 600 Washington Ave., Royal Oak. Reserve your place to ring in the new year in style at bit.ly/3BjT7FG.

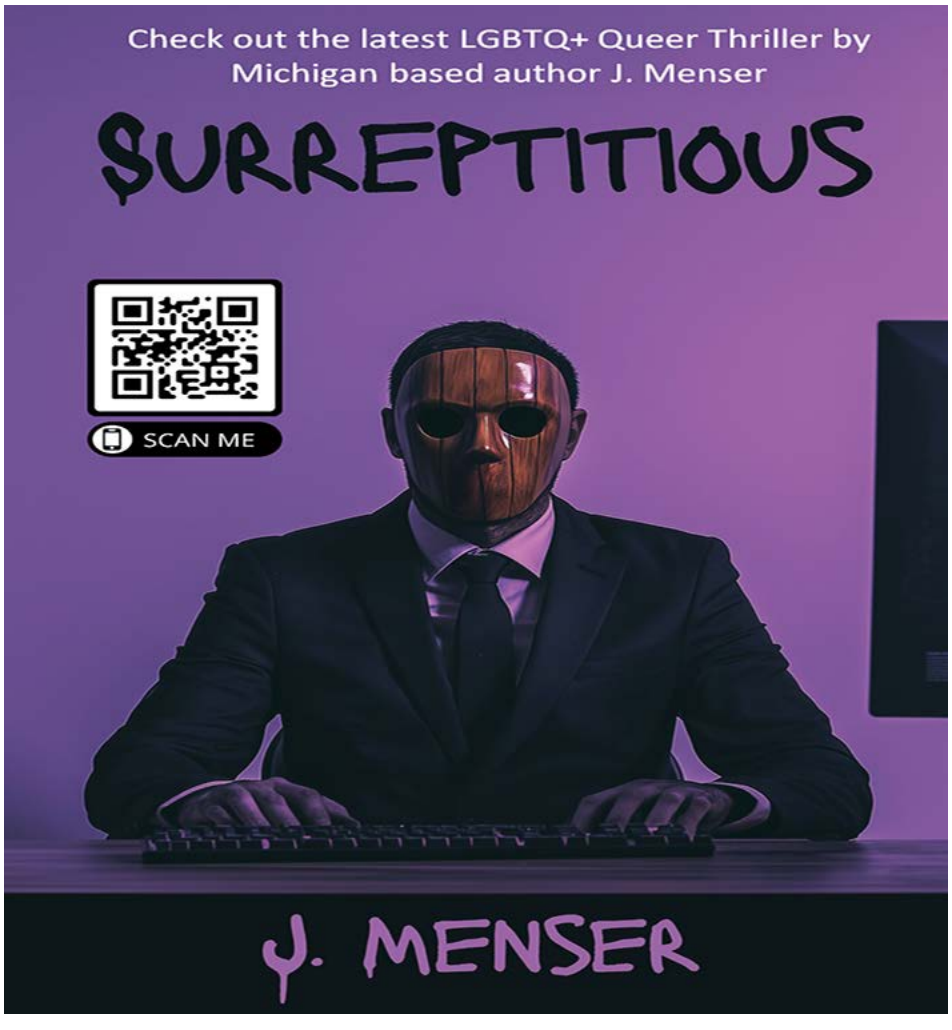

Crown Pharmacy
Transfer your prescriptions today
Specializing in providing world class HIV pharmaceutical care
Free HIV Testing
Pickup free at home HIV testing kits
Free Syphilis testing
Blister Packaging Available
Free Delivery!
Toll-Free Available 24 Hours/Day: 1-800-381-7518
www.crownpharmacy.com
24401 Plymouth Rd, Redford, MI 48239
313-532-DRUG (3784)
CrownPharmacy1@aol.com
Hours: M-F 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM | Closed Weekends and Holidays

5

Build Community with These Post-Election Support Groups

Oftentimes the best way to move forward is to address the past, and LGBTQ+ wellness organization Corktown Health provides space for just that. Following the election, they've been hosting weekly support groups to share and connect with others. And because building community is a necessity, Corktown provides both in-person and virtual options to accommodate everyone. Find the hope and support you need in one another, so we can all move forward together.

Mondays, 10-11:30 a.m. (in-person at Corktown Health Center — 1726 Howard St., Detroit), Fridays, 2-3:30 p.m. (virtual). Fill out an interest form at bit.ly/4gnei96.



LGBT Detroit staffers. Photo: Andrew Potter

These Michigan LGBTQ+ Orgs Will Have Your Back in 2025 After Trump's Inauguration

From mental health services to storytelling, activists prepare for challenging times

BY LIAM CLYMER

The dust has settled. Donald Trump will be coming back into power in January — an exhausting thing for many LGBTQ+ community members to wrap their heads around. However, that doesn't mean we're powerless.

For Michiganders, our identities are built on grit. This is a time to come together, pull up our sleeves and get to work. Detroit's LGBTQ+ organizations have wasted no time launching into action.

These organizations offer a wealth of resources and programs to aid in having hard conversations, navigating emotional impacts and learning to carry on with compassion. With the new year approaching rapidly, make a commitment to yourself and the greater LGBTQ+ community to keep up the good fight.

Leaders from Michigan's LGBTQ+ organizations are issuing a rallying cry for those feeling uncertain.

Stand with Trans

The folks over at Stand with Trans know that in order to look out for the community as a whole, you need to look out for yourself first. That's why they are unveiling new mental health services as a part of their plan for 2025.

Stand with Trans Director of Clinical Services Daily Andrews said that the services have been in the works for a while, but by the end of 2024, there was a clear need for implementation.

"Ninety percent of LGBTQ+ youth have said that they feel impacted by recent politics in a negative way," Andrews said. "I think that giving space — a safe space, a private space, a confidential space — is important for people to talk about those things going on and what those negative experiences are."

The organization offers a variety of service options ranging from virtual and in-person counseling to a sliding pricing scale and taking those without insurance. On top of that, there are four entirely free spots for those who need them and the org plans to expand and include group counseling soon.

"If you come to me and you have a need, we can figure it out," they said.

More information is available at standwithtrans.org.

Affirmations

Affirmations has found that conversation is vital post-election. The organization's

See **Michigan Orgs**, page 8

A Different Kind of Holiday Spirit

Sufjan Stevens brings queer fans together in communal song across Michigan and beyond

Sufjan Stevens (center) is bringing fans together post-election for communal holiday singalongs. Photo: Denny Renshaw

BY ERIKA W. SMITH

If your favorite holiday song has a title like "Did I Make You Cry On Christmas Day? (Well, You Deserved It)" or "Come On! Let's Boogey to the Elf Dance!" you're probably a Sufjan Stevens fan. And even if you're not, you're welcome at a "Sufmas" singalong.

Detroit-born singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens has earned a devoted fanbase over his nearly 30-year career. He first gained fame for his pair of albums about Midwestern states, "Michigan" (2003) and "Illinois" (2005), but his discography is widespread and eclectic, from the experimental, electronica-influenced "Age of Adz" (2010), to the deeply personal outpouring of grief on "Carrie and Lowell" (2015), to the romantic and orchestral soundtrack to "Call Me By Your Name" (2017). His most recent release, "Javelin" (2023), is an exploration of love and loss dedicated to his late partner, Evans Richardson.

And then, of course, there are the Christmas albums. Between December 2000 and December 2010, Stevens released over 100 Christmas songs over a series of 10 EPs, which were eventually gathered into two compilation albums: "Songs for Christmas" (2006) and "Silver and Gold" (2012). Every December for many years — no one can confirm exactly how many — fans have organically gathered to sing their favorite songs from the compilations, in events affectionately nicknamed "Sufmas." This year, Stevens' label, Asthmatic Kitty, helped spread the word about the singalongs and created a website for fans to RSVP, which spurred even more people to organize events of their own.

For many, the opportunity couldn't have come at a more appropriate time.

A few days after the presidential election, singer-songwriter Sara Azriel made the decision to host a Dec. 21 concert, "One World: Songs of Healing in Peace," in her hometown of Muskegon — her first live performance since the coronavirus pandemic.

"I felt very called," Azriel tells BTL. "Like, now is the time for music." Along with her original songs, the event featured a singalong inspired by Sufjan Stevens's 2012 Christmas tour, which Azriel attended.

"It was just absolutely a profound experience; honestly one of the most profound shows I've ever been to," she says. "It really stuck with me because I'm a singer-songwriter, but I've also directed choirs, and I'm a music educator. I've always had a passion for communal singing and how powerful and magical and healing and connective it is."

A social media promo post for

See **Sufjan**, page 13

Continued from page 6

executive director, Cheryl Czach, recognized that in order to combat fear, the organization would need to bring the community together. Affirmations is doing just that through town halls and informational sessions.

"In November, we did what we called a community chat where about 60 community members came together to process how they were feeling — kind of a peer-to-peer support," Czach told BTL. "We're going to do something similar to that again in February where folks can just come in and talk with each other, connect with each other, and process how they're feeling post-inauguration."

She said that getting involved with local organizations is important because "we're stronger together."

"It was really powerful to be in that room and see people connecting, supporting and lifting up how important it is to be there for our transgender family because their rights are the ones under the most attack," Czach added.

Upcoming events and engagement opportunities can be found at goaffirmations.org.

A recent event at Affirmations. Photo: Chris Azzopardi

Roz Keith at a Stand with Trans event. Photo: Andrew Potter

Equality Michigan

In addition to its central role as a catalyst for moving pro-LGBTQ+ legislation through the State House, Equality Michigan is centering its response around combatting misinformation and sharing LGBTQ+ narratives. The organization is part of the national "Here We Are" campaign — a storytelling project that shares glimpses into the lives of trans individuals as told by them.

Through this format, Equality Michigan empowers trans voices. These easy-to-digest videos lay out that trans folks are just everyday people who deserve respect just as much as anyone else — being trans is just one part of a multifaceted identity.

Take a peek at the stories being told thus far at hereweare.equalitymi.org.

Michigan ACLU

Jay Kaplan, the ACLU of Michigan's LGBTQ+ project staff attorney, described the advocates working at the organization as "the guardians of civil liberties and constitutional rights."

In line with that, Michigan's ACLU is gearing up to defend the protections already in place in this state. Kaplan said that Michigan is a "good state" with lawmakers and elected officials tending to support LGBTQ+ identities — however, this could make them more of a target for the incoming administration.

Kaplan said the best way to combat this targeting of safe LGBTQ+ states is through something called "integrated advocacy," which he described as "a combination of different tools."

"That could involve litigation in terms of bringing cases in court," he said. "It could also involve public policy advocacy — working with the legislature, working with policymakers to ensure the bad stuff doesn't happen and that good stuff continues to happen or is maintained."

He added that to best engage with policymakers, they needed passionate individuals to have these conversations. "We need to be talking with our friends now in the state and talking about what our friends can do to either prevent or lessen the blow of the attacks from the federal government," Kaplan said.

"You have the ability to do something," he said. "You're making a difference because ultimately it is the voters who decide the direction of our country, and where we're going to go."

To volunteer with Michigan's ACLU, visit aclumich.org.

LGBT Detroit

For LGBT Detroit Executive Director A. Nzere Kwabena, the next step is about "protecting our wins" — something that can't be done without considering the history of the LGBTQ+ community.

2025 will mark the 30th anniversary of Hotter Than July, an annual LGBT Detroit institution. Given the significance of the year it falls on, Kwabena wants to make the celebration something unforgettable.

"Planning has already begun to expand community engagement from now until July," he said of the long-running event. "I'm very excited to see how we learn the history of Hotter Than July and how we activate for Hotter Than July."

At the same time, he acknowledges that reflection alone doesn't lead to action. Kwabena highlighted the new programs and ideas that volunteers are bringing to the organization. "These people want to do more than just file paperwork or make phone calls; they want to get their hands dirty. One wants to develop a new program that's going to help people with grief, one volunteer wants to help in our infrastructure development and the third person wants to do Hotter Than July outreach in a very unique way."

The influx of programming comes from a renewed passion in volunteers, he said. "That's new for us… most volunteers want to do a one-and-done action," Kwabena said. "[More volunteers] has an increased impact and is long-lasting."

All volunteering and program information can be found at lgbtdetroit.org.

Whether it's through time or funds, there are ways to give back to local LGBTQ+ organizations. Have their back so that they can have yours as we weather a tumultuous time.

Give the Gift of

Between The Lines

Never miss out on the latest news, inspiring queer stories, and so much more!

Annual Subscription
Home or Business Delivery
$95 per year

PRIDESOURCE.COM/SUBSCRIBE

SUBARU

at Hodges...

SDF-34 OUTBACK

Come See Our Inventory

HODGES SUBARU
Metro Detroit's "Subaru-Only Dealer"

21205 Woodward Ave • **Ferndale** • MI • 48220
248.547.8800 • www.hodgessubaru.com
HOURS: **MONDAY** - 9:00A.M. - 7:00P.M.
TUESDAY - FRIDAY - 9:00A.M. - 6:00P.M.
SATURDAY - 10:00A.M. - 2:00P.M.

EVERYDAY!

EXCELLENT SERVICE • OUTSTANDING SELECTION • FANTASTIC PRICES....

HIV IS NOT THE END. BE EMPOWERED!

ACCESS RESOURCES AT **MATRIXHUMANSERVICES.ORG**

Drown Out the Trump's Anti-Trans Rhetoric with Love

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

As I write this, I'm learning that there's been a shooting at yet another school in the United States. This time in Wisconsin. Reportedly a 15-year-old student shot and killed a teacher and a student and then herself. Other students were also wounded, some critically.

It does not bode well for the foreseeable future that the party taking over the entire federal government next month believes that the solution to gun violence is more guns.

But gun violence isn't the only worry parents and kids will have under Trump 2.0. Previously eradicated diseases like polio could once again rage through communities thanks to an incoming administration hostile to "vaccine mandates." The vaccine for polio dropped in 1955. And so did the rates of polio. According to the Mayo Clinic, "About 16,000 cases of [polio] occurred each year in the U.S. in the 20th century compared with none in 2020."

I am not a mathematician, but 16,000 seems like a lot more than zero. Sounds like the polio vaccine was a good thing. But we are living through the dumbest timeline in U.S. history.

The man Trump wants to be the next health secretary, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is a long-time skeptic of vaccines and has been repeating the debunked claim that vaccines cause autism for decades, a causal relationship that Trump appears to also believe now.

> *To paraphrase Whoopi Goldberg from the movie 'Ghost': We in danger, girl. But we're not alone.*

During a Dec. 16 press conference, Trump said, "You're not going to lose the polio vaccine." He does not, however, believe it should be mandated. In fact, he's been railing against vaccine mandates, even threatening to take away school funding for schools that require students to be vaccinated.

It's fucking bonkers.

Trump and RFK Jr. have got me agreeing with Sen. Mitch McConnell, of all people. The 82-year-old had polio as a child.

"Efforts to undermine public confidence in proven cures are not just uninformed — they're dangerous," McConnell said in a statement.

As a warning to Kennedy, he said, "Anyone seeking the Senate's consent to serve in the incoming Administration would do well to steer clear of even the appearance of association with such efforts."

If you're wondering if Trump's other nominees might also be dangerously unqualified to lead the departments he has nominated them for, rest assured that they most definitely are.

Trump's first administration was a master class in incompetence. The next Trump administration will be, too, except they will have none of the constraints that existed during his first term. Trump has already learned that he can get away with anything and everything and that he will never face consequences for anything.

The fact is, the American people can count on Trump for very little. Supposedly, one of the things that helped him win the election was his promise to lower grocery prices, which were already on the decline. Now he says — surprise, surprise! — he probably can't.

"It's hard to bring things down once they're up," he told Time Magazine.

Yeah, no shit.

What we can count on Trump to do is to hurt people: mass deportations, appointing more judges hostile to marriage equality and, hey, maybe even bringing back polio. Sadly, transgender people are a favorite target for right-wing hate.

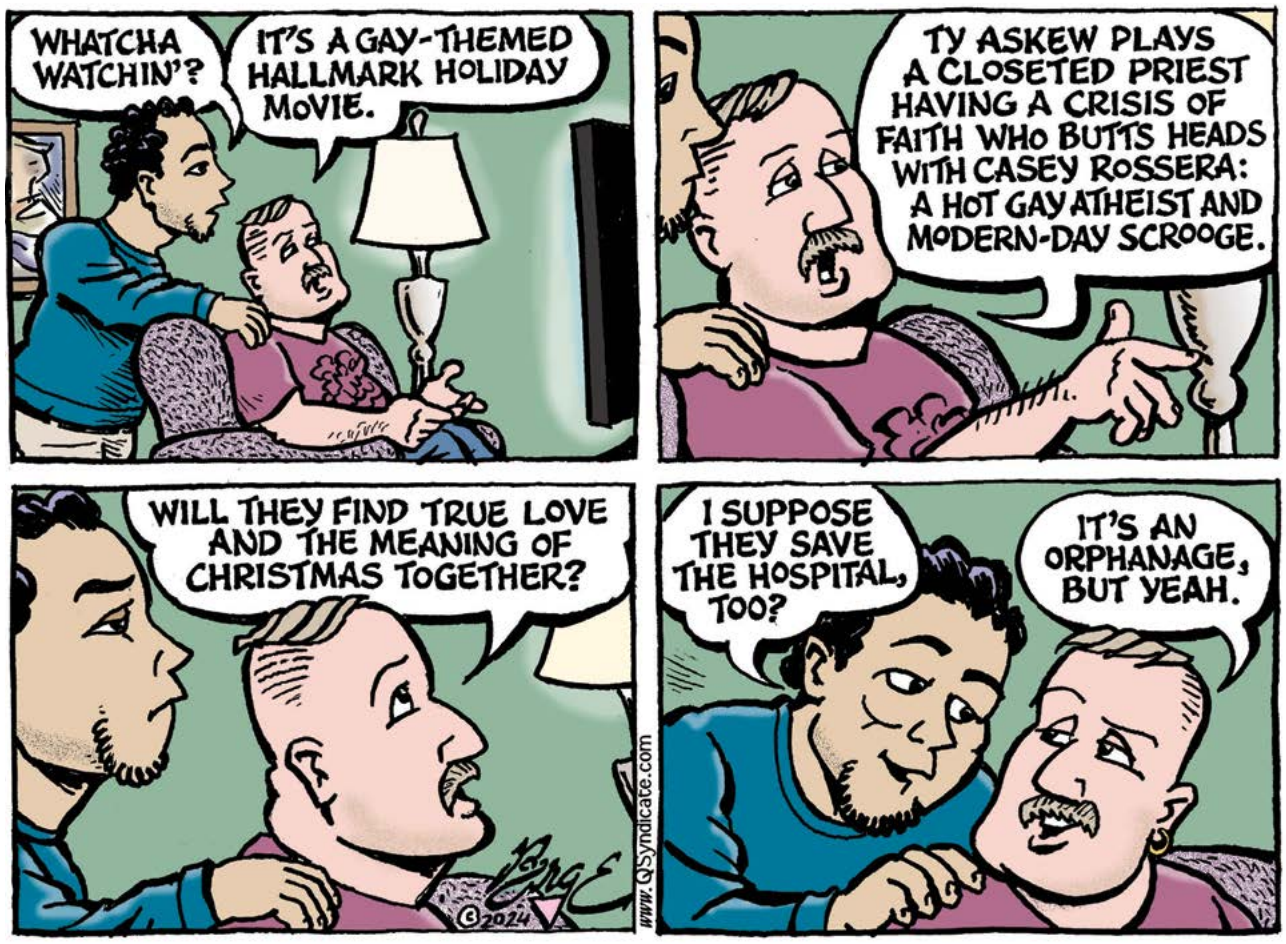
Trump has promised to protect children from "left-wing gender insanity."

"No serious country should be telling its children that they were born with the wrong gender — a concept that was never heard of in all of human history — nobody's ever heard of this, what's happening today," Trump said in a 2023 statement. "It was all when the radical left invented it just a few years ago."

This is, of course, not true. The "left" did not invent gender identity and children are not going to school and coming home several days later having undergone gender-related surgery. Yes, this is something Trump actually said and believes.

To paraphrase Whoopi Goldberg from the movie "Ghost": We in danger, girl. But we're not alone.

If you are trans, please know that you are not alone. The entire country isn't against you. Your life matters and you deserve to not only be here, but to live as your authentic self. If you are the parents of a trans child or just have people in your life who are trans, go out of your way to let them know that you love them and care about them. Don't assume they already know. Explicit demonstrations of hate demand even more explicit demonstrations of love.


WHATCHA WATCHIN'?
IT'S A GAY-THEMED HALLMARK HOLIDAY MOVIE.
TY ASKEW PLAYS A CLOSETED PRIEST HAVING A CRISIS OF FAITH WHO BUTTS HEADS WITH CASEY ROSSERA: A HOT GAY ATHEIST AND MODERN-DAY SCROOGE.
WILL THEY FIND TRUE LOVE AND THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS TOGETHER?
I SUPPOSE THEY SAVE THE HOSPITAL, TOO?
IT'S AN ORPHANAGE, BUT YEAH.
©2024
www.QSyndicate.com

THE SCROLL

QUICK HITS & CAN'T MISSES

Owosso Man Faces Life in Prison for Attempted Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate Attack

Mack Davis, a 22-year-old Owosso man, pleaded guilty to a federal hate crime involving an attempted mass killing targeting LGBTQ+ individuals. According to court records, Davis planned to attack a political party headquarters and a nearby gay bar.

Davis had researched mass killers, developed a detailed plan and amassed an arsenal including two firearms, hundreds of ammunition rounds, bomb-making parts, tactical gear and knives. One knife was inscribed with an anti-gay slur. He also conducted surveillance of his targeted locations, vandalized his LGBTQ+ neighbors' cars with homophobic graffiti and fired approximately 60 bullets into his neighbors' properties. Davis faces a maximum penalty of life in prison, with sentencing to be scheduled at a later date.

The arrest comes on the heels of a controversy involving State Rep. Josh Schriver, who posted to X on Dec. 2, "Make gay marriage illegal again. This is not remotely controversial or extreme." Schriver has also advocated for keeping a now-defunct anti-sodomy law on the books. Rep. Noah Arbit warned that preserving the law could potentially enable future legal persecution of LGBTQ+ individuals if federal protections change. In response, Schriver wrote on X, "The mouth and anus are not reproductive organs. Sodomy is indeed a crime against God and natural order" and claiming it "releases plagues of disease, promiscuity and perversion."

Should Michigan Become an LGBTQ+ Sanctuary State?

Sanctuary states actively protect LGBTQ+ residents through legislation that often includes "shield" laws aimed at protecting queer people, especially when it comes to discrimination protections and accessing transgender healthcare.

A petition at charge.org seeks to establish Michigan as a sanctuary state. "Establishing Michigan as a sanctuary state would provide necessary safety and sanctuary for marginalized groups, particularly the LGBTQIA community," the petition reads. Establishing Michigan as a sanctuary state, "would safeguard the rights of all its citizens irrespective of their orientation or identity."

The grassroots effort was started by Michigander Laurel Walker, who will send it to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and Attorney General Dana Nessel after more signatures are collected. Visit bit.ly/3P72VWs to sign.

Michigan Senate Passes Laws to Improve Name and Gender Marker Change Process

Michigan Senate Democrats have passed two bills to simplify name and gender marker changes for transgender and gender-nonconforming residents in the last few hours of the final legislative session of the year — just before a new session begins under a Republican Senate majority. House Bills 5300 and 5303, introduced by Reps. Laurie Pohutsky, Emily Dievendorf, Felicia Brabec and Helena Scott, will modernize the legal name change process and ensure transgender Michiganders' access to self-determination on birth certificates.

Two related bills (HB 5301 and 5302) regarding gender markers on driver's licenses and state IDs were not voted on during a dramatic few days on the Senate floor that put dozens of bills in jeopardy. All four bills had initially passed the House 56-0, with Republicans walking out in protest. After Senate passage, the bills await Gov. Whitmer's signature.

Remembering LGBTQ+ Journalist Troy Masters

Troy Masters, a pioneering LGBTQ+ journalist and media founder, has died by suicide at age 63. His four-decade career included founding QW Magazine, the first glossy publication for gays and lesbians, and Gay City News in New York. In 2017, Masters established the Los Angeles Blade, fulfilling what he called his "sole purpose, of creating a voice for Los Angeles," according to an online obituary. He is survived by his mother, Josie Kirkland, and sister, Tammy Masters.

Happy Birthday, Menjo's!

As you celebrate the season, consider a stop at Menjo's, which marked its 50th anniversary on Dec. 12. The original location of the queer night spot, now located on McNicholas Road in Detroit, was originally a Jewish supper club. Michigan native Madonna famously spent time at Menjo's as a rowdy teenager who was eventually barred for "pulling her vagina out" on the dance floor. The disco ball she danced under as a 16-year-old is still on display at the entertainment complex.

Barry Manilow's Farewell Tour

Iconic out gay singer Barry Manilow recently announced his last-ever tour, which will include a stop in Detroit on June 3 at Little Caesars Arena. The star, who came out publicly in 2017, told CNN that "the public was not ready for anybody to come out" as gay during his early career. "Now being gay is no big deal," he said. "Back in the '70s, it would have killed a career." Tickets are on sale now at 313presents.com.

Barry Manilow. Courtesy photo

Why Are We Thirsting Over Luigi Mangione? The Ethical Dilemma Playing Out on Social Media

Mangione and the problem of prison rape jokes in LGBTQ+ culture

BY GREGORY STORMS

Luigi Mangione in a widely distributed social media photo.

By now, it's likely you know the name Luigi Mangione. You probably even have a mental image of him.

Mangione, of course, is the handsome 26-year-old Ivy League graduate who was arrested at a McDonald's in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on Dec. 9 and charged with the second-degree murder of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson, along with various weapons charges.

Once Mangione made national news, his pictures instantly flooded the internet and he became something of a folk hero, despite the charges against him. While not everyone, of course, condoned this act of violence, Mangione was heralded by some as a symbol of populist justice striking back at a member of the elite class who, according to many, gained his status and resources on the broken backs (sometimes literally) of the sick and injured.

Mangione's looks have got him plenty of attention, particularly among some queer people, who have already cast him as a sex symbol. Even the grainy security camera images show a good-looking young man with a vibrant smile. Once his identity had been confirmed and his personal photos, like the one of him hiking shirtless — with his six-pack abs exposed — made it to every corner of the internet, the thirst became very real.

It's not shameful to have complex, even competing thoughts, about someone like Mangione. In fact, it's quite human to be attracted physically to someone while still disavowing their actions, especially in the context of legal accountability. There is a long and ongoing history of social science research on the impact of perceived attractiveness on accountability measures of justice-involved individuals. For example, a study conducted in 2019 with funding from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development indicates that while there may be some preferential treatment in arrest and conviction of individuals considered attractive, such considerations may have little or even negative impact on actual sentencing, especially for men. For men, at least, there seems to be no benefits or drawbacks to perceived attractiveness when it comes to sentencing, indicating that we can find people attractive and still hold them accountable for their actions.

So far, there has been varying levels of support for Mangione's actions, too. According to ABC News, as of this writing, supporters have even created a defense fund currently valued at over $100,000. This is less a tacit acceptance of violence and more a symbol of the growing class divides in this country. This story has been a catalyst for many on social media to share their own horror stories of being denied coverage by their insurance companies and helping raise awareness of the real-life impact of a broken healthcare system.

But there's something that doesn't sit with me: remarks about how he'll fare in prison based on his looks. Cristobal Cardona wrote on Facebook that Mangione is "a rich kid that believes that murdering someone is the answer to society's ills. What a fool. He'll be popular in prison." On Threads, @roocos_ reality responded to a shirtless picture of Mangione by saying "he's gonna be popular in jail."

I'm particularly troubled by this as it's obviously code for prison rape. While some people might see it as just a joke, these kinds of comments are so deeply ingrained in our culture — even within the LGBTQ+ community — that we often fail to reflect on the harm they perpetuate.

Comments like these, intentionally or not, glamorize sexual assault. This is especially problematic for queer people. LGBTQ+ (and especially transgender) people are far more likely to be sexually assaulted while incarcerated than non-LGBTQ+ inmates, both by other inmates and by prison staff.

> *"When we normalize sexual assault against incarcerated individuals and reduce serious violence to a punchline, it silences survivors and gives perpetrators more freedom to act without accountability."*

We've known for decades that most incidents of sexual assault go by unreported for many reasons. RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, reminds us that both robberies and non-sexual assault and battery crimes are twice as likely to be reported as sexual assaults. Too often, those charged with the protection of the public, including incarcerated people, do not take such reports seriously.

Even if the allegations are verifiable, these incidents are frequently swept under the rug, holding no one accountable and leading to deep mistrust in the criminal justice system. Another common reason for underreporting is the shame we place on people — cisgender men included — in situations of sexual violence. That shame and fear of disbelief, humiliation and retribution are powerful motivating factors for keeping one's own experiences of sexual violence a secret.

The jokes I've seen about Luigi Mangione contribute to a larger issue. When we normalize sexual assault against incarcerated individuals and reduce serious violence to a punchline, it silences survivors and gives perpetrators more freedom to act without accountability.

Still, we can acknowledge our attractions to people without going overboard or causing harm to others who may have experienced such violence. It just takes us pausing for a moment and asking ourselves whether the joke we're making does any unintended harm. Let's give each other some grace here — we all say things we don't fully think through — but let's also commit to doing better whenever we can.

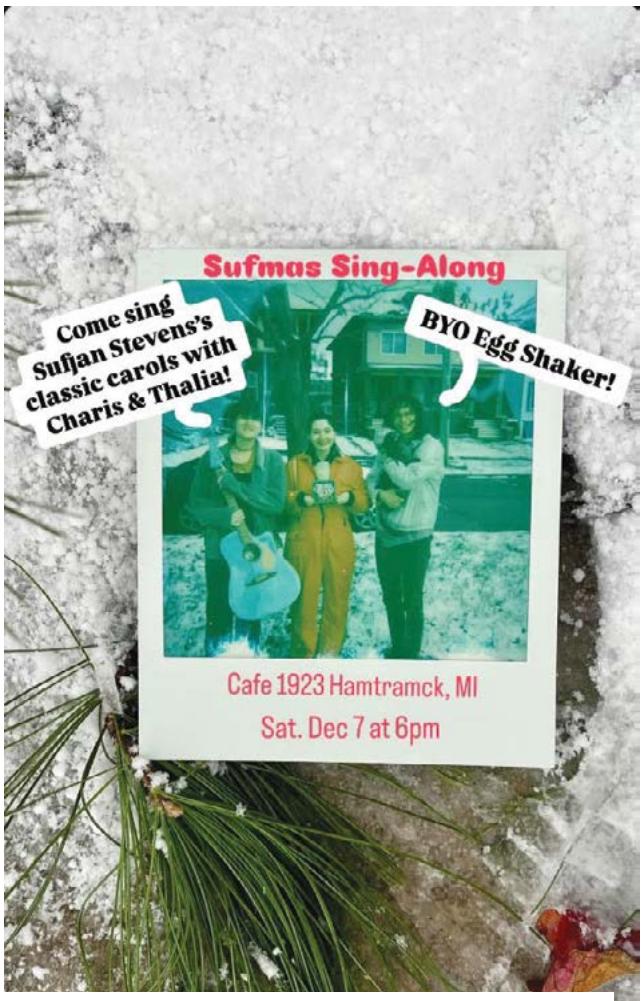
Raised in Michigan until moving to Chicago to conduct anthropological research on the queer kink community, Gregory Storms (they/them) is a public educator and the Senior Manager of Public & Community Engagement at the Chicago History Museum. In this role, they work to raise awareness of marginalized histories, including those of the LGBTQ+ community, through accessible educational programming, exhibition development and community outreach efforts.

Sufjan
Continued from page 7

a singalong hosted by Charis Armstrong in Hamtramck.

For Wei Zhou, a political organizer who lives in Chicago, hosting a Sufmas singalong was a welcome distraction in the wake of the election. "This is kind of my way of having a little passion project," they tell BTL. "Like, I'm throwing this event to distract me from my very emotionally draining job."

Unlike, say, Mariah Carey's magnum opus "All I Want for Christmas Is You," Stevens' depiction of Christmas is one that encompasses both the joy and the sorrow of the season, says Matt Thompson, who has organized Sufmas singalongs in Ontario since 2018. Stevens' Christmas albums are "about how beautiful Christmas is and how weird Christmas is and how shitty things can be, and it's all that at once. Not many artists can do that," he says. And during the singalongs, "there is a sense of relief that comes from being in a room for two hours with a bunch of people, singing about how beautiful life is and how awful life is."


Sufmas Sing-Along
Come sing Sufjan Stevens's classic carols with Charis & Thalia!
BYO Egg Shaker!
Cafe 1923 Hamtramck, MI
Sat. Dec 7 at 6pm

Although Stevens has never discussed his sexuality in interviews — the dedication of "Javelin" was the first time he publicly named a partner — the depiction of queer love and longing in his lyrics has earned him a devoted LGBTQ+ fanbase since the early days of his career. And queer community is very much a part of these holiday singalongs.

> *"When I was a kid, before I even knew that he was queer or that I was queer, I would listen to him and I just felt a lot of commonality. There's something beautiful and creative in his music and a spark that he has that kind of draws out the tender parts of us that we hide. Maybe we're drawn to his whimsy and also his despair."*
>
> — Charis Armstrong, Hamtramck "Sufmas" singalong organizer

"When I was a kid, before I even knew that he was queer or that I was queer, I would listen to him and I just felt a lot of commonality," says Charis Armstrong, a teacher who organized a singalong in Hamtramck. "There's something beautiful and creative in his music and a spark that he has that kind of draws out the tender parts of us that we hide. Maybe we're drawn to his whimsy and also his despair."

The inclusivity at the core of Sufmas celebrations extends to vocal talent, too — and the lack thereof. In Chicago, Zhou brought a karaoke machine to "encourage a community and energy of imperfection." Armstrong was initially hesitant to host a Sufmas event, but after playing through some of the songs with a friend, they realized that "singalongs and Christmas carols are just giant jam sessions. It doesn't have to be perfect."

Azriel tells me, "I strongly believe that everyone's voice has value, and wish for anyone who thinks they have a 'bad voice' that they can find freedom and pleasure in the act of singing, simply for the love of it."

In other words, you don't have to sound like Sufjan Stevens to sing "Christmas Unicorn."

AFFIRMATIONS
Queer Joy
IS ALL AROUND!
Now, more than ever, we celebrate the existence and beauty of our community. We wish you love and care this holiday season!
Stay in the loop! Follow us
@goaffirmations
www.goaffirmations.org/support

Between the Lines
Delivered
Straight to
Your Mailbox
Support LGBTQ+ journalism and get Between the Lines delivered to your door for just $95/year or $10/month.
WWW.PRIDESOURCE.COM/SUBSCRIBE

Jonathan Bennett's Power Move

The 'Mean Girls' actor's story is a testament to the power of being 'unapologetically yourself'

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Fortunately, queer representation on the Hallmark Channel is no longer a rare Christmas miracle, and much of that progress can be attributed to Jonathan Bennett. The actor, producer and proud Midwesterner is breaking barriers and challenging norms as a trailblazing advocate for queer love stories on a national stage.

From his early days in Toledo, where he embraced life as a self-described "little queen," to earning the fan-dubbed title "The Gay King of Christmas," the "Mean Girls" actor has built a career rooted in authenticity, resilience and a passion for storytelling — especially narratives that celebrate inclusivity and resonate with diverse audiences.

Now 43, he takes pride in seeing others thrive in the spaces he has worked tirelessly to create. He has not one but two new groundbreaking queer-inclusive projects on the Hallmark Channel: "Finding Mr. Christmas," a reality competition series he hosts in search of the next leading man for a Hallmark Christmas movie, and "The Groomsmen," a three-part film that follows three best friends from diverse backgrounds and cultures as they come together to celebrate their weddings.

In a recent video interview, Bennett reflected on his roots, fondly recalling late-night drives from Ohio to Ann Arbor to go clubbing at Necto. ("Necto for life, baby!" he exclaimed.) He also shared his aspirations for LGBTQ+ representation in media, including a dream project: reuniting with Lindsay Lohan for a holiday film. (Lindsay, are you listening?)

Ever the showman, Bennett introduced himself on camera with a playful face-framing gesture but confessed he couldn't fully commit to the move. "My suit's so friggin' tight I can't even lift my arms," he joked. While it wasn't exactly the right moment for an armpit reveal, Bennett cheekily added, "Watch 'Mr. Christmas.' There are plenty of shirtless guys there."

Jonathan Bennett hosts "Finding Mr. Christmas" on the Hallmark Channel. Photo: Kim Nunneley / Hallmark

What can you tell me about growing up in Toledo and spending some time in Ann Arbor?

I was just a little queen dancing around in Toledo, but we only had one gay bar called Bretz and me and my friends would drive up to Michigan and go to the Nectarine. Is it called Necto now or do they still call it Nectarine?

It's just Necto.

Now it's Necto, very millennial. They shortened it and made it cooler.

For Gen Z'ers, it'll just be Nec.

N. It'll just be the letter N.

What do the people back home in Ohio say about you being "The Gay King of Christmas"?

My family loves it. It's been a journey going from a little gay boy in Ohio scared of his own shadow, because it's just a different place to grow up. You have to code-switch. You have to do all these things to protect yourself growing up and then to really own who you are and be unapologetically yourself. And then to do that on national television and then to tell queer stories with love stories that look like your love story for the world to see has been such a journey. It really has.

And it's scary at times, but also so rewarding for so many, many reasons. I tell these stories and make sure that we're telling queer love stories on Hallmark because I think Hallmark has the power to reach such a vast audience.

After doing my first Hallmark movie, "The Christmas House," where I had the first same-sex kiss [with co-star Brad Harder], I saw the outpouring of support and love and the need for that story to be told. I knew that my purpose in life and my mission was to tell queer stories to a broad audience and not tell queer stories to a queer audience because those stories are being told a lot.

But what I wanted to focus on was telling queer stories to a broad audience that might not know an LGBTQ+ person in their life or might not know that they know one and be able to really show the humanity of those characters — and what their love looks like — so that way people watching could then identify with them as people and maybe connect with them as people. Maybe you can also change some hearts and minds that way.

With these films, how did you start to see that you were having that kind of influence?

After I did "The Christmas House," so many people reached out online and messaged me just saying, "Thank you. I got to watch a Christmas movie with my family like we always do at the holidays, but this time I was able to see a love that looked like mine on screen." And it's a super powerful thing for people to feel represented in storytelling.

And it was the outpour of support and the outpouring of a lot of moms messaging me saying, "Hey, my teenager just came out to me and we were looking for what we could watch and watching your movies and seeing your love, he just lit up because he felt so connected to the characters and he felt seen." So it wasn't just the queer people reaching out to me. It was a lot of the parents reaching out saying, "Hey, just want to tell you 'thank you.'" And that was the moment where I was like, oh, this is my mission now. This is what I do. This is *all* I do.

You keep breaking new ground regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion onscreen on Hallmark. Do you intend to keep moving in that direction?

I love a challenge and I love doing things that haven't been done. That's what ignites me. Tell me no, because that will fire me up more than anything. Tell me we can't do it, because I will find a way for it to happen.

Being a queer actor in Hollywood for 20 years, I got so many nos and doors closed that it just fuels your fire where you're like, I now have a tank, a battering ram, a cannon, and I will bust down any door that you try to close and I will open it no matter what. And it's not about me opening the door — it's about who walks in the door after I open it. That's my goal: opening the doors of new characters and new storytelling on Hallmark and just in the Christmas space and in the romantic-comedy space in general. I love breaking down doors, but I also do it because I'm excited to see who walks through it after me. It's not about me, it's about the stories. I'm happy to open the door to let others walk through.

After meeting one of the contestants, Daxton Bloomquist, on "Finding Mr. Christmas" and hearing his story as a fellow gay Midwesterner, you got emotional. What was going through your mind?

I think that moment with Daxton in the first episode is a culmination of all my hard work for the past four years of telling queer stories. And I remember him saying to me, "The reason I'm able to be here covered in glitter with a big rainbow sweater and a boa and feel confident prancing down the runway of the sweater challenge is because I feel safe because you're here. Because I know you did it." And when he said that to me, I got so emotional because it was like that moment where you're like, it worked. It friggin', friggin', friggin' worked.

There's that old poem about the person going with all the starfish that washed up on the sea, and they're throwing the starfish back and they look down and the guy says, "But there's thousands of them. This isn't going to make a difference." And the guy picks up a starfish and throws it back in the sea and he goes, "It made a difference to that one." And so it's like, I'm not going to be able to save everyone and I'm not going to be able to do everything for everyone, but just Daxton telling me that was enough. I did it. I open the door and guess what? Daxton was the next person to walk through it. What a friggin' delight.

What challenges have you faced in changing the narrative for queer people on TV?

It has been challenging and it hasn't, because the network has been super supportive of every single queer idea or storyline I bring to them. They pretty much greenlight everything I bring that makes sense and works. The challenge for me as a creator, producer, writer and actor is bringing to Hallmark storylines and scripts that are rooted in humanity with a love story that is authentic and beautiful. That's where the challenge is — making sure that we're telling a story that everyone can relate to. I think the big challenge for me in telling queer stories is… I have written on my dry erase board at home "BBD: Bigger, Better, Different." What are we doing that is BBD with storytelling? Is it bigger than another story we've told? Is it better than another story or is it different? It's got to have at least two of those three qualities.

So the pressure to tell queer stories is immense for me because I want to make sure that every time I do it, I do it in the most authentic, correct way possible. And I'm very proud of the projects that I've done and been a part of and told queer stories in because I do feel like every single one of them is authentic. They're authentic and they're grounded. We're not just telling a gay story to tell a gay story.

What inspired the portrayal of a gay man within a circle of straight male friendships in "The Groomsmen"? Could you share what influenced this dynamic and what thoughts guided you in shaping this group dynamic?

I got married two years ago. My group of friends were my groomsmen in my wedding; some were gay, some were straight, and I was the groomsman in most of their weddings the years before that. Some of us were gay, some were straight. And I thought that was a really interesting plot for a storyline because it's something that really happens in 2024. And it's something we don't see in movies a lot. We don't see straight friends and gay friends in one kind of squad brotherhood, navigating life. But that's the funniest group of friends to navigate life with. And it's the most interesting group of friends to navigate life with.

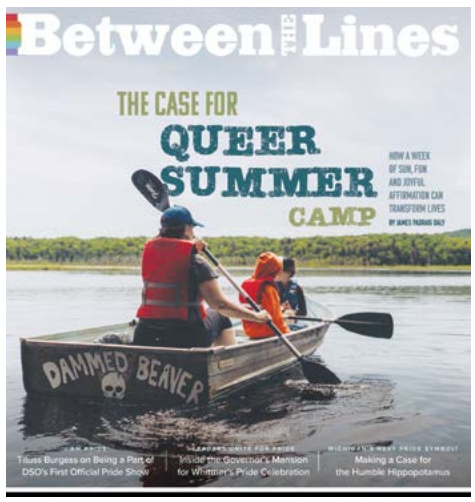
Because in my group of friends, we make fun of each other constantly every single day. If you're being nice to me, I know something's up; if you're making fun of me or calling me out or cracking a joke at my expense, that's how a lot of men show love for each other. That's how we share our emotions with each other.

But then that same group of friends, at the end of the day, if you're crying and need someone, a shoulder to cry on, they're the first ones there. So I think there's a really fun dynamic of taking the piss out of each other. I can't lie to my squad. If I try, they call me out instantly and they're like, "Bullshit, Jonathan."

And then, if at the end of the day, those same guys that are making fun of me for not being authentic and real, I can then call and say, "I need help," and they're the first ones to show up. So I think it's a really powerful dynamic to show in movies, and we've never seen it before. So that, again, goes back to my storytelling

See **Jonathan Bennett**, page 21

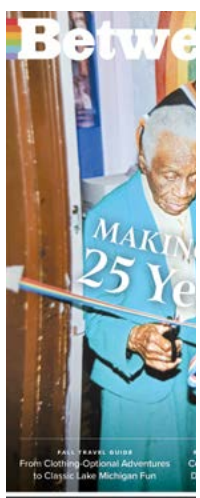
Between THE Lines
ONWARD. TOGETHER.
In its 15th year, why Five15's drag queen bingo matters more than ever.
PRIDESOURCE.COM
NOVEMBER 14, 2024 | VOL. 3246 | FREE



Between THE Lines
YOUR 2024 MICHIGAN PRIDE CALENDAR
MARCHING TO THE BEAT OF HER OWN DRUM
HOW LOVE GUIDES THE MUSIC OF FERNDALE PRIDE HEADLINER DJ HOLOGRAPHIC

Between THE Lines
PRIDE AS PROTEST
Through Art and Politics, Queer Activism Takes Center Stage as Motor City Pride Marches On

Between THE Lines
WE KNEW HER WHEN
Chappell Roan: the meteoric rise of a Michigan (yes, really) princess
PRIDESOURCE.COM
AUGUST 22, 2024 | VOL. 3234 | FREE



It's a Wrap: BTL Stories That Shaped 2024

From a record-breaking Pride season to Brat Summer to a tumultuous election season that has left the community scrambling for solid ground, 2024 was one for the books. In many ways, we can't say we're sad to shut the door on this one, but before we bid adieu to this often-stressful year, let's take a moment to remember just why 2024 will be one to remember — and why, on the whole, it was a year that proved our enduring strength and offered hope for our collective future.

JANUARY

Madonna Comes Home

In January, months after a delay caused by a scary stay in the ICU battling a bacterial infection, Madonna finally returned to her home state to perform her Celebration Tour, a wide-ranging retrospective on the legendary pop star's decades-long career. BTL covered the Detroit concert from several angles, including a look back at her Michigan upbringing, her AIDS advocacy and a review of her emotional Detroit concert.

FEBRUARY

LGBT Detroit Turns 30

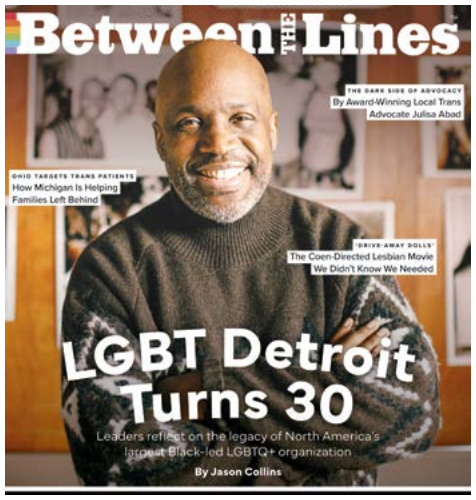
It's hard to believe LGBT Detroit has entered its fourth decade, but at the same time, is it? This mainstay organization has had staying power for a host of good reasons. BTL spent time chatting with Executive Director A. Nzere Kwabena and key members of the LGBT Detroit team to share the story of this vital community resource, North America's largest Black-founded and led LGBTQ+ non-profit, and what its existence means, especially, to the Black LGBTQ+ community in Michigan.

Also in February: BTL writer Layla McMurtrie shared experiences from the Michigan sex worker community in her article "The Criminalization of Sex Work Disproportionately Affects Queer People. These Michigan Sex Workers Are Speaking Out."

Between THE Lines
Witnessing History at the White House
An exclusive insider look from our staff on celebrating Pride at the President's home
By Chris Azzopardi & Sarah Bricker Hunt
PRIDESOURCE.COM
JULY 11, 2024 | VOL. 3228 | FREE

Between THE Lines
WHAT WE WON
10 Big Political Wins for LGBTQ+ Michiganders in 2023
A COMEDIAN IN FLUX
Alex Edelman Is Still Figuring Himself Out, One Joke at a Time
NEW YEAR, NEW START
Former BTL Publishers on Surviving a 'Terrifying' Cancer Battle
WELCOME HOME, MADONNA
PRIDESOURCE.COM
JANUARY 11, 2024 | VOL. 3203 | FREE

G RUTH PROUD
ars Later
As the center that bears her name hits a milestone anniversary, Ruth Ellis' mission lives on
By Sarah Bricker Hunt
5 Convention Moments We Won't Soon Forget


Between THE Lines
THE DARK SIDE OF ADVOCACY
By Award-Winning Local Trans Advocate Julisa Abad
OHIO TARGETS TRANS PATIENTS
How Michigan Is Helping Families Left Behind
'DRIVE-AWAY DOLLS'
The Coen-Directed Lesbian Movie We Didn't Know We Needed
LGBT Detroit Turns 30
Leaders reflect on the legacy of North America's largest Black-led LGBTQ+ organization
By Jason Collins

MARCH

At Home with LGBTQ+ Leaders

For BTL's annual Home issue, we took a peek inside the homes of local LGBTQ+ leaders. Readers got a glimpse into Detroit Police LGBT Liaison Corporal Dani Wood's kitchen, ACLU Michigan attorney Jay Kaplan's artful living room, Executive Director Angela Gabridge's peaceful living room retreat, BTL publisher Benjamin Jenkins' serene patio space (complete with a friendly feline companion), and many others. Participants told us that these spaces offered reminders about their life journeys and places to find comfort away from a sometimes chaotic outside world.

APRIL

The Michigan Family Protection Act

Shields LGBTQ+ Families

In April, we took a look at the recently passed Michigan Family Protection Act, a legislative win for state Democrats that paves the way for equal legal protections for LGBTQ+ families. The Act dismantled a 1988 law that criminalized surrogacy, eased onerous requirements LGBTQ+ families have

See **2024 Wrap Up**, page 18

The Center for Relationship Health
Founder and Director Dr. Joe Kort
JOIN CRSH'S
QUEER MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP
Individual, Group and Couples Therapy
www.crsh.com | 248-399-7447
25600 Woodward Ave., Suite 215, Royal Oak
First Wednesday & Third Friday of Every Month
Group run by:
Gregg Johnson, LMSW
Steven Taylor, LMSW
Scan for more info or go to crsh.com

A beautiful beginning.
Start the new year by celebrating your love with a wedding band as unique and timeless as your connection. Bold, classic or subtle, you'll find the perfect ring to reflect your journey together and the love you share.
SCAN THE CODE TO SHOP ALL WEDDING BANDS!
LEWIS JEWELERS SINCE 1921 "YOUR DIAMOND STORE"
300 S Maple Rd., Ann Arbor
734.994.5111 | LewisJewelers.com

Continued from page 17

had to pursue to gain legal parental representation, added legal protections for children born through surrogacy and reproductive methods like IVF and reduced the cost of gaining formal parental relationships recognition in Michigan. As Rep. Samantha Seckloff, who wrote the bill, told BTL, "Everyone should have the right to be able to start or grow their family."

WEDDING ISSUE

Queer Couples Seek Stand-in Moms and Dads Online When Their Parents Won't Support Them

Our annual Wedding issue was a joyful celebration of queer love and commitment — and an honest look at the challenges some engaged queer couples still face. Writer Nayanika Guha introduced readers to Facebook group Stand in Pride, which pairs engaged queer couples who are estranged from their parents with stand-in moms and dads. "Coming from a non-supporting family, having people around to support you and who are proud of you for just being you makes you feel less alone," said local bride Jessica Young. She added that, for many, it signals something potentially lifesaving: "That your life does matter and that you are worth something."

(Above) At the August Kamala Harris rally. Photo: Andrew Potter. (Left) Michigan leaders and Pride Source staff at the White House Pride picnic in 2024.

MAY

Queer Wanderlust

Our "Queer Wanderlust" issue was an unofficial kick-off to the summer travel season, with a heavy emphasis on planning a vacation right here in Michigan. "That Michigan Guy," travel expert Ryan Redoute, outlined his perfect queer-affirming summer road trips, including familiar hot spots like Saugatuck and hidden gems located all over the Great Lakes State, from the U.P. to Lake Michigan beach towns a stone's throw from the state border. "Why do I love Michigan?" he responded incredulously to our question. "Girl. What's not to love!?"

Also in May: BTL spent some time getting to know the dedicated staff working to create safe Jewish spaces for the local queer community in the article, "Why So Many Local Queer Folks Are Flocking to Mishpacha, Temple Beth Emeth's Thriving LGBTQ+ Affinity Group.

JUNE

Pride Season Kicks Off

Pride Season 2024 was relentless (and we mean that in the best possible way). With multiple festivals all around the state every single weekend (and many popping up in late May, into July, August and even September), there was literally something for everyone seeking Pride fun. BTL produced three Pride issues and our annual Pride Source Magazine in June alone. Here are a few highlights:

- "How Grief and Love Drive Ferndale Pride Headliner DJ Holographic's Proudly Femme Sound"
- "How Detroit Artist Tylonn Sawyer Is Remembering Pulse Nightclub Victims During Pride Month Exhibition"
- "How Hello Mr. Revolutionized Queer Storytelling — and Why It Wouldn't Be What It Was Without Michigan"
- "How Machine Dazzle Is Transforming Our Collective Michigan Garbage Into Queer Joy" (Pride Source Magazine)

JULY

BTL Goes to Washington

In June, BTL staffers Chris Azzopardi and Sarah Bricker Hunt were invited to attend the annual Pride Picnic on the White House lawn, an experience they shared with readers through a series of stories and photos. Highlights included a behind-the-scenes tour of the White House Briefing Room, a speech by First Lady Jill Biden, and bumping into Michigan leaders like out lesbian Attorney General Dana Nessel, Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter and many others.

AUGUST

Vice President Kamala Holds Massive Michigan Campaign Rally in Detroit

BTL was on hand at the Aug. 7 Detroit rally,

Harris' first major event in Detroit after announcing her candidacy just a few weeks prior and naming running mate Tim Walz, who accompanied her, the day before. More than 12,000 people showed up for the rally, where Harris pledged to support "the freedom to love who you love openly." The event, participants told BTL, was brimming with "optimism, hope and love."

Also in August: BTL looked back on an interview Editorial Director Chris Azzopardi conducted with Chappell Roan just before her fame exploded in "On the Tour Bus with Chappell Roan: Everything the Superstar Told Us About Drag, Making Straight Boys Dance and Being Part of Pop Music's 'Alliance of Queer Girlies.'"

SEPTEMBER

Ruth Ellis Center Turns 25

Former and current Ruth Ellis Center staffers, volunteers and clients helped BTL tell the story of an organization that has been serving at-risk LGBTQ+ youth in Detroit for a quarter of a century. "Ruth would be mighty proud of the cofounders and the pioneers, and she would be so proud of the young people," Dr. Amorie Robinson, co-founder, clinical psychologist and associate director of outpatient therapy in behavioral health at Ruth Ellis Center, told BTL. "The ones finding ways to survive and to authentically be themselves in the world as challenging and dangerous as it is, especially in a climate like this."

OCTOBER

Michigan Shines as a Beacon of Hope for the Trans Community

In October, BTL writer Jordyn Bradley interviewed a couple who left Florida for Michigan a decade ago, a move they were grateful to have made when their child came out as transgender. Bradley's story "From Sunshine to Sanctuary State" explores the ways Michigan legislators and advocates have been intentional about building an affirming, legally sound community for Michigan's trans residents.

NOVEMBER

Onward

The big headline, of course, was the reelection of Donald Trump, a disappointing — and worrisome — outcome for many in the LGBTQ+ community, including BTL team members. Our staff collaborated on a post-election issue focused on what we do have and what we *can* do. The "Onward" issue featured local drag legend Sabin, who, for the past 15 years, has been leading Five15's Drag Queen Bingo, a truly intersectional community endeavor with a surprising power to heal in times of conflict and adversity. BTL content creator Liam Clymer reported on the pulse of the community in the wake of the election, and a mix of stories centered on hope and reflection rounded out the coverage.

Also in November: BTL writer Anni Arbour profiled Bree Taylor, who is running a new org aimed at advocating for and protecting Michigan's trans community in the article "Michigan's Transgender Unity Coalition Rises Up in the Age of Trump."

Kesha found stand-in-dad Daniel Blevins on the Stand in Pride Facebook group. Courtesy photo

DECEMBER

Affirmations Turns 35

In 2024, Ferndale LGBTQ+ community center Affirmations celebrated its 35th anniversary — a major feat for an organization that started as a community helpline in the basement of local advocates Susan Pittman and Christine Puckett, a lesbian couple who were murdered by a neighbor. Today, the organization has surpassed the wildest dreams of its early founders, standing strong throughout constantly changing political eras and despite tremendous growth, staying true to a vital mission to recognize the humanity in every person who walks through the door.

Keeping Them Guessing

Ahead of her Ann Arbor show, Sasha Velour talks the power of storytelling and what her Michigan grandmother taught her about drag

BY EVE KUCHARSKI

The key to a good reveal is deceptively simple: Never let the audience know your next move. But the art of a perfect reveal takes it just one step further. Just ask genderfluid drag artist and "RuPaul's Drag Race" winner Sasha Velour, an authority on the subject.

"They need to never see it coming," she tells BTL ahead of her Jan. 17 show at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor. "I myself forget the reveal while I'm performing and somehow still my body does it."

True to form, Velour isn't just the star of the show — she is the writer, director and producer of the 90-minute production that blends drag, live art and, perhaps most importantly, storytelling. While Velour's show is unique, the surprise-filled performance is in part a response to her book, "The Big Reveal: An Illustrated Manifesto of Drag," in which she explores the history of the art form, its deep impact on the LGBTQ+ community and personal memoir-like moments. Within the live show, Velour weaves themes about the positive power of drag into a performance that goes from lighthearted to poignant, and back again.

"The key to a great reveal is it's always a metaphor for something in the story of the number. It's usually the conclusion of all the thoughts that have been building," Velour says. "And I love a self-empowerment story, so about 75% of them are about, 'The power was within you all along!'"

Even before winning Season 9 of "RuPaul's Drag Race" with one of the series' most iconic rose petal-filled reveals, Velour has been an empowered artist, deftly navigating various artistic mediums across a multitude of platforms. In recent years, she starred in HBO's award-winning series "We're Here," illustrated a cover of The New Yorker, hosted and starred in her much-applauded drag revue, "NightGowns" and performed in a sold out five-week run of an autobiographical stage production at La Jolla Playhouse.

Amid a packed schedule, Velour caught up with BTL to discuss the inspiration for her book, anti-drag legislation and her surprising ties to Michigan.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention this: Your grandmother Jo was a reference librarian from our state and taught you the definition of drag, right?

Oh my god, I can't believe you know that. [Laughs.]

What was that interaction like?

My grandmother was born in 1911 in Michigan, and she grew up knowing about drag, which was popular in the '20s and '30s. It kind of blows my mind looking back at how much these aspects of queer culture existed and created fun things that we could enjoy that were for everyone. But yeah, she showed me "Some Like It Hot," because I was a little gender-bending child without knowing that there was any context for that, and what does a reference librarian do but give you the larger context? [Laughs.]

Many of the themes in "The Big Reveal: An Illustrated Manifesto of Drag" are expressed in the live show, and you mentioned wanting to have "context" about how you fit into drag before writing the book. Did digging into drag's history change your perspective on it or how you present it?

Yeah, I think it did, because unlike so many other cultures, when you're queer you have no family stories about where that part of you comes from. So it's kind of like drag queens to me are the aunties and grandmothers of the queer community, and we have to tell those stories.

I tried to write them in the book, but I know the best way to communicate is as a storyteller. And so, [whether]

See **Sasha Velour**, page 24

Sasha Velour in "The Big Reveal." Photo: Greg Endries

◂ Jonathan Bennett
Continued from page 15

kind of agony that I have when trying to tell these stories. Is it bigger, better and different than the other stories we've seen? "The Groomsmen" definitely was, and that's why it was a no-brainer.

People on the internet are really into the chemistry between you and your co-star, Alexander Lincoln. What should people know about building that relationship for the screen?

You know what? Alexander is such a goof and an idiot, and I mean that in the best way possible. He's just unapologetically Alexander. And that's what's so fascinating about him. And it goes back to the thing that I really try to strive for, which is being unapologetically yourself. And he is that.

And so it was so easy to have chemistry with him because we both were like, here's who I am. Here's my quirks. Here's what I do. It was almost like when I met my husband, Jaymes. I was just myself and just so stupid and corny and cheesy and wacky, and that's what made Jaymes fall in love. And so meeting Alex, we both were just authentically us.

It was just so fun to have him on set because he also is different from any of the other Hallmark actors that you're used to seeing. He has a different style in his acting, which I thought was really refreshing.

I have to ask about you and Lindsay — Lindsay Lohan, of course.

Oh yes. There's only one Lindsay in my life.

You are now both a part of the Christmas universe. Does that mean you two will bring your universes together at some point?

So let me tell you what I want: I want to do a Christmas movie with Lindsay, and I want her to be my guardian angel. I want it to be a "Christmas Carol" where she's like the Christmas angel or ghost that comes and helps lead me through whatever I need to learn on my journey around the holidays, because I think that would be so funny, and I think Lindsay would look so fierce in a really amazing, sexy, white outfit, and she's just like my angel that comes and leads me around, and I think that would be a really fun movie to make.

And you've told her this?

I have not, but we're telling her right now.

What did you think of the new "Mean Girls" adaptation?

I haven't seen it because I was busy being on Broadway. I didn't get to see the movie because I was in a show eight times a week, so haven't seen it, but maybe I'll watch it one day.

Did you contribute to any of the decor in the "Finding Mr. Christmas" house? And did you take any of the decor with you when you left it?

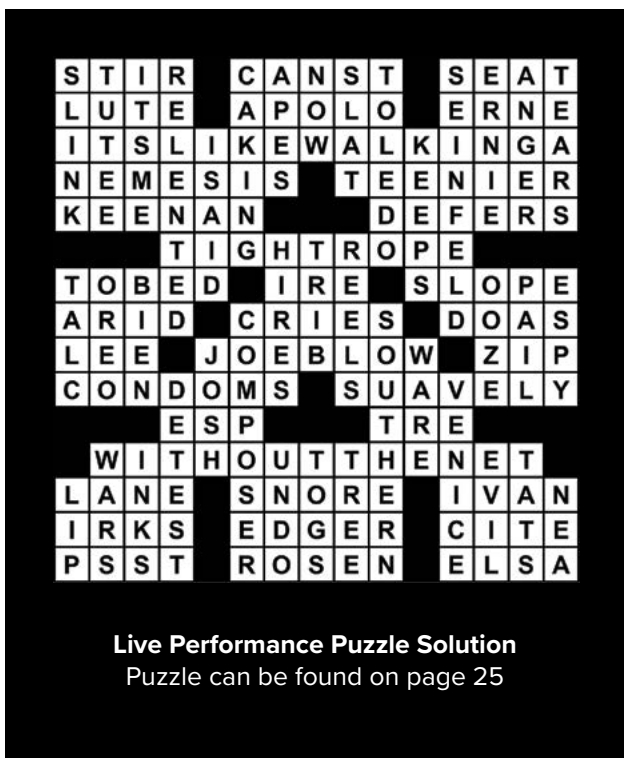
I helped design the entire aesthetic of the show and the house. I was one of the designers of it. However, I didn't actually physically do anything because we had the most amazing art department and set designer that did all that stuff. And so I helped come up with it, but I didn't actually execute any of it.

I didn't steal anything from the set, but I did walk out with 10 new friends, which are the hunks of "Finding Mr. Christmas," because they're such a brotherhood. They're such a squad. They're just such a great group of guys and they're there for each other. And so I walked out with 10 new friends.

Did you ever steal anything from the "Mean Girls" set?

No, but I stole my jacket from "Christmas House" because... well, I wouldn't say I stole it, but I took it and then they never asked for it back because it was fitted to me like a glove. It fits so well that I'm like, OK, I'm taking this home. I need this jacket in my life.

And then they called a few months later and were like, "We need the jacket back because it's going in the Smithsonian archives under the LGBTQ+ archives for the first time there was ever a same-sex kiss in a Christmas movie." And I was like, OK, it's a good weekend to give the jacket back. And so I have to go pretend like, oh, I must have taken it accidentally and send it back to the network so they could put it in the archives. The one time I take a jacket that's fitted to me like a glove is the time that the Smithsonian calls and is like, "We need the jacket back."



Live Performance Puzzle Solution
Puzzle can be found on page 25

IIC
ITALIAN INTERIOR CONCEPTS
Shop In Italy, ON US
Don't miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore the pinnacle of Italian luxury furniture and interior brands, courtesy of Italian Interior Concepts.
Learn More Here
28096 WOODWARD AVENUE
ROYAL OAK, MI, 48067
(248) 648-1515
Sales@Italianinteriorconcepts.com

Venture to Unexpectedly Queer Grand Rapids

Your two-day itinerary for a wintry weekend road trip in West Michigan

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Grand Rapids' Eastown neighborhood. Photo: Sarah Bricker Hunt

Heading to Grand Rapids during peak winter may seem ill-advised for some, but quick road trips don't have to stop after Labor Day weekend. This winter-friendly, queer-angled itinerary includes plenty of cozy spots where you can marvel at the lake-effect snow from inside cafes, shops, entertainment venues and more — each staffed by friendly LGBTQ+ folks eager to share the story of a city this community has transformed over the past several years into a charming, welcoming West Michigan oasis. One that, in 2024, scored a perfect 100 on the Human Rights Campaign's Municipal Equality Index, a national system that ranks cities based on their treatment of LGBTQ+ people. So, gird those Midwestern loins with proper winter attire and hit the road. Grand Rapids is waiting for you.

Day One: Community and Culture

Grand Rapids Pride Center

Begin your journey at the Grand Rapids Pride Center (343 Atlas Ave. SE), the heartbeat of local LGBTQ+ community support. This true community space offers resources, support groups and a friendly environment that will immediately set the tone for your weekend. Check their current events calendar in person or online — you might catch a workshop, meeting or community gathering that connects you deeper to local queer life. Don't miss the Grand Rapids Trans Foundation, housed in the same colorful, cheerful building in the heart of Eastown, Grand Rapids' queer-friendliest neighborhood.

Happy Cat Cafe

Next, head to Happy Cat Cafe (447 Division Ave. S) — because what could be more delightful than enjoying your morning coffee surrounded by adorable felines and the unique volunteers and visitors who love them? This pawsitive spot, one of my favorites from a recent trip to explore Grand Rapids' queer friendliness, offers a welcome blend of caffeine and cuddles, with a chill atmosphere that embraces diversity. Sip your latte, pet a cat and soak in the inclusive energy that defines Grand Rapids' queer-friendly spaces.

The 12th House and Spirit Dreams

Grand Rapids offers some truly unique queer-friendly metaphysical spaces. The 12th House (8 Jefferson Ave. SE) and Spirit Dreams (1430 Lake Dr. SE — right next to the Grand Rapids Pride Center) are more than just shops — they're sanctuaries of self-exploration and spiritual connection. Browse crystals, tarot decks and unique gifts that celebrate individual identity and cosmic connection.

Basalt, followed by Cakabakery

Queer-owned Basalt (1450 Wealthy St. SE), located in Eastown, is "like a diner, but better," according to its website, which also notes that "all kinds, except the unkind, are welcome here." It's a good description for this comfortable, modern stop that somehow offers dive vibes and hipster elegance at once. Freshly made ingredients make for a fun menu brimming with unique tacos, several thoughtful vegetarian and vegan entries, kitschy cocktails, and a host of starchy sides and mains that will cure your hangover or line your tummy for a fun night out in GR.

After lunch, take a stroll or a quick drive up to The Cakabakery (919 Fulton St. E), a gay-owned bakery featuring fresh, local ingredients crafted into custom desserts and a dizzying array of grab-and-go options that you're definitely going to have to make some hard choices about. While cake is the unsurprising core menu item here, don't sleep on the shop's handcrafted flavored popcorn. I apologize in advance that you're about to become a caramel corn snob, but we get one life. Don't waste it on bad caramel corn.

Queer nightlife

As evening falls, Grand Rapids' queer nightlife beckons. The Apartment Lounge (33 Sheldon Ave. NE), a legendary LGBTQ+ bar, offers a historic backdrop for your night out. With decades of queer history within its walls, it's more than a bar — it's a living museum of community resilience.

See **Grand Rapids**, page 26

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993
BTL
Between the Lines
PRIDESOURCE
Are You Ready To
Introduce Your Business
to the LGBTQ+ Community?
PRIDESOURCE.COM/ADVERTISE

Timeless Pieces
For Years
To Come
GIORGIO CONTI
FINE JEWELRY & TIMEPIECES
22637 Woodward Avenue, Ferndale Michigan 48220
gconti.com | (248) 569-6747

Welcoming all, partnering together, enriching lives.
Brio Living Services offers a wide array of living options and services for older adults across the state of Michigan.
We welcome all, regardless of faith, national origin, or any aspect of human diversity.
Grand Rapids
Lansing
Ann Arbor
FULL CONTINUUM OF CARE
Chelsea Retirement Community, Chelsea
Porter Hills Village, Grand Rapids
INDEPENDENT LIVING
The Cedars of Dexter, Dexter
Cook Valley Estates, Grand Rapids
SKILLED NURSING
Kresge Healthcare & Rehabilitation Center, Chelsea
Porter Hills Village Health Center, Grand Rapids
HOME HEALTH CARE
Porter Hills Home Health Care, West Michigan
CONTINUING CARE AT HOME
Avenues by Brio Living Services, Greater Grand Rapids
PROGRAM OF ALL-INCLUSIVE CARE FOR THE ELDERLY (PACE)
Huron Valley PACE, Ypsilanti
Life Circles PACE, Holland & Muskegon
Thome PACE, Jackson
AFFORDABLE HOUSING
The Pines Senior Apartments, Chelsea
The Thome Rivertown Neighborhood Assisted Living, Detroit
Six Afflordable Living Communities, throughout West Michigan
Brio
LIVING SERVICES
BRIO LIVING SERVICES–GREAT PLACES TO LIVE OR WORK! MyBrio.org

◂ **Sasha Velour**
Continued from page 20

on stage at a drag show [or] behind the scenes annoying people with all the lore I've learned about things [laughs], I think it's so powerful to know that we come from somewhere and that we don't have to reinvent the wheel by doing drag or by being boldly queer in the world. People have been doing that forever, and we can find strength and inspiration from how they've done it.

Sasha Velour in "The Big Reveal." Photo: Greg Endries

I have to confess, I'm a huge fan of the horror genre and I'm fascinated by your use of it and figures like Dracula and the Wicked Witch of the West as drag influences. Horror has a unique way of capturing attention and using subtext or overt themes to explore deeper ideas beneath the surface. When did you learn that you could use drag as a mouthpiece to do that?

I love that question. There are all these rich metaphors in horror and fantasy about the way that our world works. And even though sometimes it breaks the rules of reality as we know it, there's truths about how human beings think and act, what we're afraid of and what we fantasize about that gets illuminated by exaggerating it through horror and through fantasy.

It was really when I came to New York for the first time and saw all the experimental drag in Brooklyn, in particular. It was seeing the types of lip-sync performances that are everywhere in New York City where people have a story and political message, and sometimes a lip-sync performance in a bar can be a work of activism. Seeing just how powerful that can be at communicating got me so excited and inspired, and I think it's the reason why I dove into drag.

You've talked about the authenticity in drag and that it can be really beautiful because at shows you might be seeing a heightened version of somebody, but in many ways it's an expression of their deepest, most authentic selves. Yet despite that honesty and vulnerability, people have lashed out at it with drag bans and anti-drag legislation. What's your take on that?

Such a huge disconnect from our experiences of it as being a place that's full of positivity and acceptance. It's not about what actually happens on the stage; it's projections based on the fact that we are out and open about being queer, about being trans, about being nonbinary — however people identify.

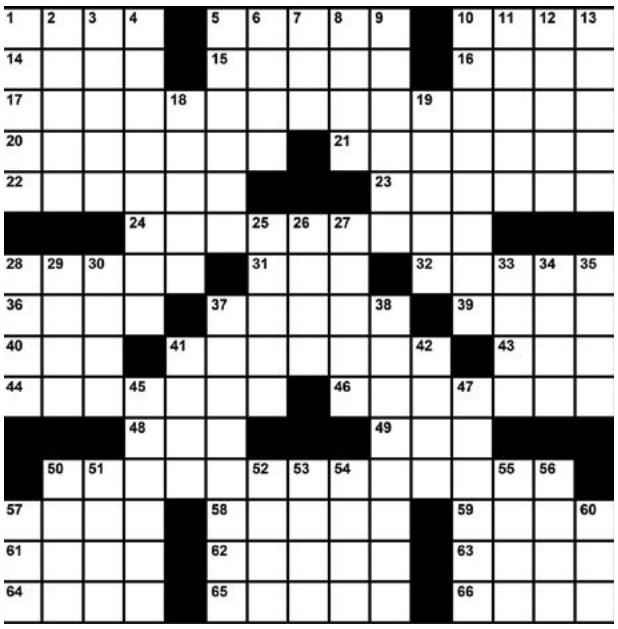
Queer and trans people are everywhere; we've learned we've always been, and so the pushbacks against drag and against trans people are going to fail in the long run. Who knows what we are going to have to fight in the next couple of years? We've gotta be ready for it, unfortunately. But like I said, I'm overall an optimist about the flow of progress and people's understanding. And every time I do a show, people show up who have not been to see a drag show before, so I do feel like the knowledge of what we really are all about is growing. And once people see it and learn about drag, they don't think that it's something dangerous anymore. As long as we have opportunities like this show, people can bring their family and see this is something positive; there's layers to this, it's truly for everyone and it's beautiful and enjoyable.

It's clear in your performances and approach to your art that you have a keen attention to detail and story. What was something you loved working on in this show?

My day job before I was a performer was a graphic designer and I laid out other people's books for my living and [spent time] learning a lot about printing technology and the mechanical reproduction of books and ideas and imagery.

I put some of those nerdy things into the show because I wanted it to be a celebration of bookmaking and pop culture, and so the entire show and the art in the book very heavily leans on a CMYK color palette — the cyan, magenta, yellow, and black that make up every offset printed image or color that you can see in books. My costumes are all in that palette, the lighting is all in that palette — we bring special gels so that it's all lit consistently. There's usually one person in every show who picks up on it. [Laughs.]

Sasha Velour will perform in "The Big Reveal Live Show!" at 8 p.m. Jan. 17, 2025, at the Michigan Theater. Buy tickets at sashavelour.com/tickets.



Live Performance

Across

1 Direction from Stephen Pyles
5 Art able to, to King James
10 A gentleman might pull it out for his date
14 Guitar of Shakespeare's day
15 Speed skater Ohno
16 River of Wilde's land
17 Start of a Sheryl Lee Ralph quote about live performance
20 Moby Dick, to Ahab
21 More minute
22 "My Lucky Star" author Joe
23 Yields respectfully
24 More of the quote
28 "Let's hit the sheets!"
31 Hot temper
32 Surface that isn't straight
36 Dry as a bone
37 "Lesbians ignite!" and others
39 "___ I say ..."
40 Liberace's nickname
41 Man on the street that gives head?
43 Fly on a guy
44 "No glove, no love" subjects
46 How Rupert Everett walks into a room
48 Unusual power
49 Threesome for Da Vinci
50 End of the quote
57 Nathan of "The Birdcage"
58 Make noise in bed
59 Sergei of "The Opposite of Sex"
61 Ticks off
62 It can cut leaves of grass
63 Paris, to Debussy
64 Head-turner
65 Lobbyist Hilary
66 "Frozen" queen

Down

1 Move provocatively
2 Eliza Doolittle, for one
3 "C'est Moi," to King Arthur
4 Gave in
5 Forming a crust
6 Simians on Roddy McDowall's planet
7 "This instant!"
8 Supporter of bedroom activity
9 Cross-dresser Klinger's hometown
10 Jerry who said "I've been outed. I wasn't even in."
11 Bert's longtime companion
12 Filmmaker Kenneth
13 Discharge on one's face
18 "Let me repeat..."
19 What some play for
25 Puts in a position?
26 Chi paper
27 Old Hollywood movie centers
28 It might go right to the bottom
29 Bite it
30 "Very well," in gay Paree
33 Seep slowly
34 Beach toy
35 Cable sports award
37 Benjamin Britten, for one
38 Rita Mae Brown's " ___ Discomfort"
41 Charles of "Threesome"
42 It may be hard or soft
45 Can't stand
47 City with wet streets?
50 Shooting conflicts
51 Makes tattoos
52 Disengage a bra hook
53 Todd Oldham designs
54 Tallahassee's the Family ___
55 Boy George's "___ Is So Civilised"
56 Skin designs, briefly
57 Hole edge for Sheehan
60 Three R's org.

See p. 21 for answers

Real Estate One
Don Chisholm, REALTOR®
(248) 425-4366
DChisholm@RealEstateOne.com
www.DonChisholmRealtor.com
NAGLREP MEMBER

Your Personal Advocate

- Friendly, Professional Service
- Empowering You Through Education
- Serving the Woodward Corridor and Beyond!

Real Estate One
26236 Woodward Ave.
Royal Oak, MI 48067

Michigan's Largest Real Estate Company

Supporting the Community Since
Before it was Cool.
100% Local Agents. 100% Client Focused.
Trillium Real Estate Helps People Make Good Decisions.
TRILLIUM REAL ESTATE
Sandi & Linda
www.trilliumrealtors.com
944 N Main St, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
734-302-3011
TRILLIUM REAL ESTATE

Continued from page 22

For those seeking more high-energy vibes, Rumors Nightclub (69 Division Ave. S) provides a dynamic dance floor and drag performances that celebrate queer creativity and expression. Steel Cat Bar (640 Bridge St. NW) offers another fantastic alternative, with a more intimate setting and a welcoming crowd.

Day Two: Shopping and Self-Care

Sidle up to the juice bar and start your morning with a fresh-pressed fruit creation from gay-owned Good Judy's (1146 Wealthy St. SE), a bright, healthy space that will help you set positive intentions for the day ahead. You'll feel refreshed and you'll be supporting a business committed to sourcing as much product as possible from operations founded by women, persons of color and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Retail therapy and self-expression

Grand Rapids offers surprisingly diverse shopping experiences that celebrate individuality, including the quirky, aptly named Rebel gift shop (1555 Wealthy St. SE) and its nearby sister store, Sticky Fingers (1503 Lake Dr. SE), a candy store that will have you happily reverting to childhood. Both provide the perfect combination of quirky gifts and sweet treats. Fox Naturals, a few blocks away (619 Wealthy St. SE), features locally crafted skincare, fragrance and beauty products in a warm, soothing space.

Inside Transfigure Print Co. Photo: Sarah Bricker Hunt

It's worth a quick drive north of downtown to check out the physical location of the online favorite Transfigure Print Co. (2221 Plainfield Ave. NE), widely known for its Protect Trans Kids line of shirts, stickers and buttons. The trans-owned business showcases local queer artists and is brimming with eclectic trans- and queer-supportive products that will help you proudly proclaim your identity and support for the community.

Wellness and grooming

Why not get a little beauty touch-up while you're in Grand Rapids? Chatting with a local hair stylist and other clients in a queer-affirming salon is the perfect way to get a real feel for this rapidly changing city, and you'll get to check something off your to-do list. Both Outlook Barber Shop (1056 Bridge St. NW) and Lilith's Lair (25 Division Ave. S) offer gender-affirming grooming experiences and support the understanding that a haircut is more than just a service — it's an act of self-expression and affirmation.

For the road

Before you pack up the car to head back home with tales of surviving — and thriving — a West Michigan winter, pop into two local establishments I've been dreaming about since my last visit for some treats for the folks back home. Consider a longer stop at Chartreuse Sisters (800 Wealthy St. SE), a queer-owned French patisserie and coffee shop offering to-die-for French pastries and barista selections inspired by the charming sisters' French-American heritage. No exaggeration, I was raving about a limited-edition financier cake I had there to anyone who would listen, for weeks after my visit.

Just down the street, you'll find queer-friendly Speciation Cellars (928 Wealthy St. SE), located in a former auto shop that's over 100 years old in an alley off Wealthy Street. Could this be where Rust Belt grit meets high-brow craft? The accessibly cool brewers offer house-created lagers, pale ales, oak-aged sours, seltzers and handcrafted non-alcoholic sodas and beverages. Pick up an artfully packaged six-pack of sours featuring flavors created with locally foraged berries and herbs.

MERITHOT

CREATE
SOMETHING
EXTRAORDINARY.

Merithot helps awesome companies create remarkable brands, strategies, websites and content.

Creative Marketing made with ♥ from Ann Arbor, MI

www.merithot.com

Christmas Eve

at

Christ Church Cranbrook

Four services, curated for every person and every schedule, to celebrate Christmas!

Early Afternoon

Family

Lessons & Carols

Late night Orchestral

Feat. Handel's Messiah

Christmas Day *feat. Kris Johnson Jazz Quartet!*

December 25 at 10 AM

Featuring the celebrated Kris Johnson Quartet come and enjoy a Christmas celebration of peace, love, hope and joy. Stay afterwards for a brunch open to all!

Scan or go to ccc-info.org/xmas for a full schedule of services & events

REVEILLON
NYE
NEW YEARS
Arcenciel
DETROIT
EVE DETROIT
2025
LIVE SET BY DJ & PRODUCER
DAN SLATER
(AUSTRALIA)
SPECIAL GUEST HOST TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON!
CHAMPAGNE TOAST AT MIDNIGHT!
TUESDAY DECEMBER 31ST
LUXE LGBTQ+ RESTAURANT & NIGHTCLUB
RESERVATIONS & INFO VISIT OUR WEBSITE:
ARCENCIELDETROIT.COM
14925 LIVERNOIS, DETROIT, MI 48238 / P: (313) 635-5080